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SUBJECT: IMPACT OF CLOSING THE OSCE MISSION TO GEORGIA

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary and comment. The OSCE Mission to Georgia offers the international community several unique tools in monitoring and facilitating Georgia's democratic, secure and prosperous development. As a monitoring mission, it provides information on the situation on the ground, with a special emphasis on security around South Ossetia; as a program implementer, it offers direct assistance in such important areas as human rights, economic development and law enforcement; as a policy adviser, it represents the collective wisdom of 56 member states. The breadth of the organization's membership, combined with the breadth of the mission's activities, lends the OSCE's voice special force. Some of the OSCE's programs in Georgia are stronger than others, and the OSCE lost a significant portion of its value-added when it lost access to South Ossetia after the August war. Even so, the military monitors, with their extensive experience and contacts, are an important resource even without that access; their loss could increase instability around South Ossetia. The EU Monitoring Mission should eventually take up the slack, if it remains. The OSCE has played a key role in facilitating Georgia's European integration, and some other mission will need to take up that role. In general, other missions should be able to cover the major gaps left by the OSCE closure, but the process will take time. The OSCE's frequent role as coordinator will be especially missed; the closure will complicate the international community's efforts to work together to assist Georgia and the region's peacefully and democratic development. Perhaps most importantly, however, in the current atmosphere of high tension between Georgia and Russia, the loss of OSCE will remove an important mediating voice and possibly increase the likelihood of direct confrontation between the two. Ultimately, with its access to South Ossetia blocked, preserving the OSCE's mission in Georgia is not worth sacrificing any fundamental U.S. principles -- but losing it will complicate our work in Georgia, and that of the international community, especially in the short term. End summary and comment.

THE MILITARY MONITORS

12. (SBU) The highest-profile element of the OSCE in Georgia is the military monitoring mission, which has been in place since 1992. Although the mission's mandate covers the entire country of Georgia, in practice it focuses on the situation around South Ossetia. The personnel are true military monitors, with the appropriate background and focus. Despite its small size -- 28 monitors, plus a supervisor -- the mission's extensive experience and contacts allow it not only to stay well informed, but also to deter destabilizing actions and promote dialogue. The mission had an office in Tskhinvali until the August war; although it has not enjoyed regular access to South Ossetia since, it still maintains

regular contacts, especially on the working level, with both Russian and Ossetian forces. A Georgian police officer stationed just outside South Ossetia recently told an OSCE monitor he was worried about what would happen when the OSCE left. The December 10 direct attack on an OSCE patrol's left. The December 10 direct attack on an OSCE patrol's vehicle could well demonstrate the threat some of the troublemakers perceive from the OSCE (see septel).

¶3. (SBU) While monitoring the military situation, the OSCE mission also gather important information on other on the ground issues, such as the current status of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The OSCE then shares that information with other interested parties, as well as uses it in the implementation of its own programs and its message to the government. It can thereby maintain a regular focus on the immediate, medium- and long-term impact of the conflict and provide input into the search for solutions at all levels.

¶4. (C) The only entity that can cover the loss of the OSCE military monitors is the recently established EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), but post expects a considerable gap in coverage will be left. The EUMM is larger than the OSCE, with around 100 monitors covering South Ossetia, and it has made impressive progress since its establishment in October ¶2008. Nevertheless, the office has not built up the institutional knowledge of the area that the OSCE has. More importantly, it has not yet managed -- despite high-level efforts in Moscow and Geneva -- to establish any reliable contacts with either the Russians or the Ossetians. Post has found that, despite its smaller size, OSCE consistently obtains more information more quickly than the EUMM. It is

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unclear whether the EUMM, in which Russia has no direct voice, will ever be able to develop the same level of ground-level cooperation with the Russians or the Ossetians. It is noteworthy that, although Russia at least acknowledged the OSCE's theoretical right to enter South Ossetia after the war (while doing nothing to facilitate actual entry), it has never recognized the EUMM's right to access. In addition, while the U.S. has a direct vote in OSCE decisions in Vienna, we do not have similar authority to influence EUMM actions.

¶5. (C) On an informal level, the OSCE has also been more directly helpful and cooperative with the USG. Although post speaks daily with both the OSCE and the EUMM, the OSCE is consistently better informed and more responsive. This difference can be explained to some extent by the OSCE's superior experience and contacts, but also by the EUMM's cumbersome bureaucratic structures. Bilateral missions from EU member states in Tbilisi are not entitled to see written EUMM reports until they are cleared in Brussels, for example.

Some members of the EUMM have in fact suggested that the U.S. Embassy should not expect daily phone updates. If the OSCE mission closes, the USG will likely need to work with the EUMM, and possibly the EU itself, to improve the flow of information. It will also be necessary to ensure the EUMM itself remains; many observers expect Russia eventually to exert pressure to close it as well.

DEMOCRACY BUILDING AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

¶6. (SBU) On human dimension issues, the OSCE fills a niche that no other single organizations may fit. The voice of 56 member states carries an authority on democratization and human rights protection that no single country, including the U.S., can hope to have. Furthermore, the OSCE represents a wider range of perspectives than the EU, but is less unwieldy than either the EU or the UN. Its Human Dimension Office therefore plays a key role in facilitating Georgia's European integration efforts by helping the government meet both OSCE and Council of Europe requirements. In both of these processes, the OSCE office, which has greater resources than the EU's mission to Georgia, often acts as the key organizer and coordinator, providing staff, facilities and other

resources. As Georgia works toward European integration, the EU will probably have to increase its engagement, and possibly its presence on the ground, to make up for the loss of the OSCE.

17. (SBU) The closure of the OSCE would not necessarily mean all its current roles would go unfilled. Other organizations do engage in similar activities. Individual EU missions, for example, or UNDP could carry out specific roles and functions the OSCE currently does. Local and international NGOs, such as the International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Penal Reform International, and Norwegian Rule of Law Advisors to Georgia could continue their efforts to support elections organization, trial monitoring, improvement of prison conditions, and other human rights programs. Post typically consults the OSCE on human rights issues for its own reporting, so we would also likely have to rely more on contacts in these and other organizations. Qcontacts in these and other organizations.

18. (SBU) Nevertheless, because of the breadth of its involvement, the closure of the OSCE mission will likely leave some significant gaps that will take time to fill. On democracy and good governance issues, for example, the OSCE currently coordinates the Ambassadors Working Group, a forum for exchanging perspectives on election and democratic development among member nations in Georgia. While another group could easily take on organization of such a group, it will take time. Additional OSCE initiatives include: promoting political awareness, education, and involvement among Georgian academic and governmental circles; structural and political development assistance to Parliament (similar to our House Democracy Assistance Committee); technical support and facilitation for political parties, including opposition parties; election assistance to the government and its Central Election Commission; international monitoring of elections through ODIHR; and assisting Parliament with the reform of Georgia's Electoral Code.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

19. (SBU) The OSCE established the Economic Rehabilitation Program not only to develop the economy in and near South Ossetia, but also to build confidence and ultimately promote

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the peaceful resolution of the conflict. With its unique access to both Government of Georgia and de facto officials and areas inside South Ossetia, the OSCE was well placed to pursue this kind of program; the EUMM and UNOMIG, as more narrowly defined monitoring missions, do not have the mandate to do so. Since losing access to South Ossetia, the OSCE has proposed continuing the small business development program in the region of Shida Kartli south of South Ossetia. The program is still worthwhile; the region is in great need of economic development, and many of the beneficiaries are IDPs.

Furthermore, if the OSCE were to regain access to South Ossetia, it would once again be in a position to combine economic engagement with confidence building in a unique way.

If the OSCE fails to regain that access and unique role, however, it has no comparative advantage as an implementer of economic programs in the rest of Georgia.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND BORDER PROTECTION

110. (SBU) The USG is by far the largest provider of assistance in these areas, but the OSCE is second, with all other donors sponsoring much smaller programs. The OSCE therefore provides a useful, multilateral second perspective on the issues. Like in the human dimension, this second perspective is especially useful as Georgia works toward European integration, because its law enforcement structures resemble European models more closely than U.S. ones. Also, the OSCE's long history of working on law enforcement and border protection issues has allowed it to build considerable

expertise in the areas. Its staff have considerable capacity to provide targeted training and other programs locally; it is easier for them to find experts with the appropriate language skills, for example, than the USG. In fact, if the mission closes, it might even be useful to explore using the OSCE or its staff as an implementer for USG programs, if at all possible.

TEFFT